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THE CASE FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

By

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Foreword.

In this changing world, where neither conditions or ideas are fixed and where new points of view are ever being reached, there is occasion for frequent restatement of the missionary appeal. Not only every generation, it seems almost that every year presents some fresh aspect of the undertaking that gives it new challenge.

Doubtless it rests yet on the ancient and unalterable commandments of the Gospel. But as surely the march of time and the progress of events bring out interpretations and reinforcements of those commands that make the enterprise grip anew.

The charm of the sermon reproduced on these pages is that it states in terms of to-day the claim of foreign missions on the faith and devotion of the disciples of Christ.

W. E. S.

THE CASE FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

By REV. WILLARD L. SPERRY

Being in substance a sermon preached in the First Congregational Church, Fall River, Mass., February 8, 1914, and before the Candidates' Conference of the American Board, in Central Church, Boston, Mass., June 7, 1914. Now somewhat revised and enlarged.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Acts 10: 34, 35.

Why do I believe in Foreign Missions? In answering this question, I shall ignore the significant and convincing results of missions, and shall confine myself to the theory of missions.

I.

I believe in foreign missions because I believe in paying my debts. Since I cannot pay my spiritual debts to my religious creditors of the past, I propose to pay that debt by passing on what I have received to the needy men of the present. For I never long forget that from the standpoint of the first Christians I am a heathen convert. My forefathers were Gentiles, barbarians, outsiders. Peter, the first great organizer of the church, nat-

urally thought of my ancestors as I now think of African savages. He did not know much about them, but what he knew he deplored. In the actual words of the New Testament they were "far off" beyond a partition wall. There was a boundary line where religion ended and where irreligion began, and our people were across the boundary. And, indeed, Peter was justified in deploring us. For the customs of our people are described in a famous passage in Cæsar. We maintained a cruel society and practised an inhuman religion in the forests of Britain. We killed the puny, the weak, the sick and the old that we might breed our super-men. We were barbarous and lustful and merciless. In our sombre Druidical rites we had common resort to human sacrifice. Cæsar tells with civilized repugnance of that great screen of interwoven boughs into which our human victims were twined to be burnt alive. Peter was absolutely justified in thinking of us as we now think of the Moro head hunters. As humankind we were beyond the pale.

But one day Peter had a vision which altered his point of view. He passed a lonely, meditative hour upon a house top hard by the sea, and when he came down from that housetop he had a new conception of his relation to us. He was given to know in a vision, that there were no realities corresponding to the boundary lines by which his world was hedged about. He learned what men have had to relearn in every successive generation that any division between man and man is both arbitrary and artificial. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, so high and so long standing, proved to be

a fiction and a falsehood. "And Peter said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." That was a far reaching discovery. It meant ultimately Christianity for us savages in Britain. For after Peter came Paul preaching the peculiar religion of a chosen people to the Gentile world. And eventually, after Paul, came Augustine of Canterbury, the first missionary to England. My forefathers were so far from being the original recipients of the gospel, that Christianity was nearly six hundred years old and had run clean through its first great cycle of history, before they knew there was such a thing. Paul, Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Athanasius and Augustine had come and done their work and gone and we were still in our unsuspecting and untroubled savagery. Not merely had the Fathers finished, however imperfectly, the tremendous task of welding the mind of the old classical world to the mind of Christ, but the ecclesiastics, from Cyprian to Gregory the Great had transmuted the contagious spontaneity of Apostolic Christianity into the organized efficiency of the Catholic Church. It is much the fashion in these days to deplore the history of these centuries as a history of degeneration, the long, sad record of the secularization of the gospel. And, truly, there was much unholy compromise. But the plain and simple fact still remains that out of these first centuries of readjustment came that aggressive institution with its resolute dogmatism, which by deliberate and definite "foreign missions" made Northern and Western Europe

nominally if not actually Christian. We are not dealing in the history of the early Church any more than in the history of contemporary Christian civilization, with an actual realization of that absolute idealism, that doctrine of perfection which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are dealing, then as now, with those tendencies, those half realized ideals, those feebly followed purposes, those desires and inclinations which give to a society a right to be called Christian rather than pagan. And it was the Church, working consciously through foreign missions, which made the Middle Ages, those pregnant centuries from which finally issued our modern world, potentially Christian rather than actually barbarian.

It is some such movement as this which Augustine of Canterbury represented. And as a result of this movement came the great monastic orders in Ireland and England, with their schools, their industries, their idealisms. The occasional Druid remains still to be found in Great Britain are interesting and awe-inspiring, but yet he who travels in the Old Country is forever forced to realize as he looks upon the Norman churches, the ruined abbeys and the cathedrals, that Anglo-Saxon civilization, as we now know it, has its foundations not in Druidism, but in Christianity. Stonehenge is tremendous, but it is also infinitely remote. It represents institutions and ideas that cannot by any exorcism of fancy be raised from the dead. All that preceded the coming of the gospel into England is for our present consciousness, pre-historic. As Anglo-Saxons even in this new land we are what we are because of foreign missions. Had it not been for the im-

pulse to missions in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries of our era, what would have been the subsequent history of England? Would ours have been a long process of degeneration, the inbreeding of our vicious weaknesses proving our undoing? Such speculations are as sombre as they are vain. And yet such historical musings keep me humble. For realizing that once I was nothing but an unconverted heathen, a member of a savage and pagan tribe, living on the outmost fringes of the then known world, I have no mind to be either indifferent or contemptuous toward those who are today in like unhappy circumstance. My brother the Chinese convert in Shansi and I both stand in the same relationship to the simple and original gospel given by Jesus to his disciples. We are outsiders, men once far off who have been brought near to Jesus through that leavening process which happily or unhappily we call "foreign missions." The study of history is a discipline in humility and charity. If I assume a separatist and supercilious attitude toward those who are today what once I was, men who know nothing about Christianity, I do not thereby greatly exalt myself. If, looking about from my vantage ground, I thank God that I am not as the Chinaman or the African I lay myself open fairly to that most unwelcome of all charges, the charge of Pharisaism. For in my self complacent thanksgiving at my fancied superiority I show at once my provincial snobbery and my dense historical ignorance. I believe in foreign missions, then, because only through them can I pay my honest debts. I cannot deny the debt; other men labored and I have entered into their labors.

I cannot cancel the debt, and being unable to pay the Christian past I would pay the non-Christian present. This is what the first Christian missionary meant when he said he was a "debtor to the barbarians." Freely I have received from those who once thought of me as a "far-off" man, freely I would give to those who are today outside the artificial, parish boundaries of my immediate world.

II.

I believe in foreign missions because they make for peace. When Cecil Rhodes founded his Oxford scholarships he had in mind not some increment of pedantry, but, as he said in his will, "an appreciation of the advantages which I implicitly believe will result from the union of the English-speaking peoples throughout the world." He thought that if Anglo-Saxons studied together, they would better understand one another, and that competition would give way to co-operation. Presumably he did not overestimate the actual influence of so few scholars upon so many great nations, but he did hope that his beneficiaries would be a leaven in the world making for union and not for schism. His benefaction is a testimony to the faith of a practical man in the large results of comparatively insignificant agencies.

Now if a university makes for peace, how much more a church. If common study removes misunderstandings how much more common worship. It is, alas, the common reproach of the communion of Churches in Christendom and of the fraternity of scholars, that for the moment

they have been unequal to the event. With astonishment and humiliation the civilized world has been plunged into a catastrophic expression of that struggle for existence which is the cruel law of life. "Belgium had no interests of her own to serve" said Asquith in the House of Commons on August 27th, "save and except the one supreme and over-riding interest of every State, great or little, which is worthy of the name — the preservation of her integrity and her national life. History tells us that that great principle is the well-spring of civilization and progress." No one can deny, that as the world is now constituted Asquith is right. We have not yet transcended the struggle for existence by which life has raised itself from its obscure beginnings through the tiger and the ape to its present attainments. But the contemporary event, has raised in its acutest form a perpetual problem, how to reconcile the natural instinct of self-assertion with the gospel summons to self-supression, how to reconcile competition with co-operation and the remorseless struggle for existence with the benevolent Kingdom of Heaven. The contemporary event has given a new validity to the old distinction between the natural and the spiritual man, it has shown how great is the gulf still fixed between the ideals of our religion and the facts of our life.

And this new perception of the un-Christian facts of daily life, its warfares and rivalries, gives also a new value to any agencies, however unequal to the task, which are striving to bring the fact and the ideal into closer relation. Now missions make for peace. Unlike trade and statescraft, they are not competitive, they are co-operative.

They destroy misunderstandings, they create a community of interests and purpose.

Li Hung Chang, shrewd, kindly Oriental, was under no false illusion regarding the actual achievements of the gospel in Christendom. When he went back to China from his tour around the world, he carried with him the memory not of our idealistic institutions, but of our crude, material greatness. "We have our beautiful literature,' he said, "far and away ahead of that of the western nations; but they have the money and the guns." What more comprehensive phrase could be used to describe the actualities in Europe today than that of this amiable alien, "the money and the guns."

And yet no more eloquent testimony to the spirit of Christian missions and the plain, humble achievements of missions was ever given than by this same Grand Old Man of China. When he was in Japan negotiating terms at the conclusion of Chinese-Japanese war, Li Hung Chang was shot and seriously wounded by a madman, and for days lay in a Japanese hospital. After he had recovered and gone back to China he writes in his diary, "I cannot think that all people are bad, even the worst of the Christians, for today I had an experience — just an hour ago — that makes me think that outside of office and business, outside of riches and honors, there are small happenings which touch a man's heart, and make him feel that humanity is not all iron, and gain and falsehood. For today this yamen, which for twenty-four years had been mine, was the destination of a great mission, such as never came within the compound before. I nearly

wept to receive them. Two native Christians came all the way from that miserable town in Japan to bring me here medicines for my head, and to see if I was getting better. The man was one of a number of native converts who had called to see me in my sick room. His name, he said, was Sato, and the boy that accompanied him was his thirteen year old son. Sato said that all the native Christians in the little mission — the mission that had first sent the delegation to my sick room with flowers — had talked about me every day since I was there, and had prayed the Christian God for my recovery. He said that they, his mission friends, did not believe in war or killing and that they had understood I had come to put a stop to the war. I wanted them to stay with me for a few days; but Mr. Sato said he was already almost sick unto death to get back home.

I think this Christianity makes poor and lowly people bold and unafraid, for before Mr. Sato and his boy left he wanted to know if they might pray for me. I said they could, expecting that he meant when they got back home again; but he said something to the little son, and they knelt right there at the door and said a prayer. I could not keep my heart from thumping in my bosom as I watched that poor man and his frightened little boy praying to God — the God that will deal with me and with them and with all mankind — that I might be well of my injuries.

I was sorry to see them go.

In this old yamen, which for twenty odd years was mine, strange scenes have been enacted, great councils

held, and midnight conferences affecting the whole world have taken place. I have received royalties and dukes, ambassadors, ministers, murderers, robbers and beggars. Men have been sentenced to death from here, others have been made glad with leases of lands, railroad contracts, or the gift of public office. But during each and every occurrence, whatever its nature, I have been complete master of my house and of myself until an hour ago. Then it was that for the first time did I believe that the honor was being conferred upon me."*

III.

I believe in foreign missions because the world is fast becoming one world and in the interchange whether of hostilities or commodities between nation and nation an interchange of ideas is also inevitable. The friction of European warfare is a friction of ideas. "All the realities of this war" says H. G. Wells, "are things of the mind. This is a conflict of cultures, and nothing else in the world." So of the peaceful and co-operative dealings of people with people, they represent the interchange of the outward and visible symbols of thought. If, then, ideas are the inspiring forces of our several civilizations, if they are the mainspring of action, why should we not acknowledge and exchange them. When each man's world was, of necessity, a parochial world and the old barriers were up between nation and nation, there may have been a semblance of validity to the argument that each nation is suffi-

*(Abridged from "The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang," pp. 118 - 122.)

cient to itself. But today there is something quaint and incongruous in the spectacle of those stubborn souls within our churches who go on disparaging missions because they are foreign and therefore outside the sphere of their interest and responsibility. These self same people sit over the breakfast table, keeping the ritual of a morning orange from Syria, drinking their coffee from Java or their tea from China, lost in the columns of the morning paper which tells of the fluctuating fortunes at Armageddon in Ultima Thule and advertises a sale of Oriental rugs or silks. And having finished their physical and intellectual trafficking with all the world they then depart solemnly to church and deprecate the missions of the American Board simply because they are "foreign."

"O sacred simplicity." Let us be consistent, and if we deplore all that is foreign let us revert to the good old days when our grandmothers worked the wool of New England sheep into stout homespun, when rag carpets did duty as Bokhara rugs, and when our grandfathers, by way of news, retailed small talk around the cracker barrel in the country store. There are, indeed, in every community a few persons who exist in the present but live in the past. They cling with a futile tenacity to the interests and customs of a nearer or more remote antiquity. "Their hearts hold longings for the buried day." They hark back to some simple, self-sufficient village life of yesterday, which antedated the complications of modern society, and is, therefore, for them the Golden Age. It is not to be expected that these pathetic anachronisms

will be interested in missions because all lands but their own are to them actually "foreign" lands. And there are, also, in every community a few more persons of dull imagination and atrophied sympathies, who, though a part of the complex, modern world, have no desire and no power to visualize their wider relationships. They never travel, they never read, they never lift up their heads from the dull treadmill of existence and look out to the horizons. "The fact is," said an old woman in East London to one of Booth's religious census takers, "me an my 'usben don't take no interest in anythink." Such people also are exempt from responsibility for foreign missions. But all these persons, whether they be relics of the past or victims of the present, are not in a majority, and certainly they are not the persons who are doing the business of the modern world. The world sweeps on past them, and carries with it that majority who for better or for worse must have dealings with all mankind. Now if there be a shred of validity in the criticism of missions as foreign, it is incumbent upon all such critics to turn their backs upon the wide dealings of man with man in the modern world, and to sound the summons for the last great retreat into our ancient and self-sufficient provincialism.

But surely the cosmopolitan world of our educated contemporaries is a better, a richer, a more stimulating world in which to live than the gossiping countryside of a century ago or the sodden slums of a modern city where body and soul alike are deadened. Rudyard Kipling has told us, it is true, that

"East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till earth and sky stand presently at God's great judgment seat."

But yet, in spite of the obvious gulf fixed between the minds of the Orient and the Occident, it is a plain part of the business of this life to make at least a beginning of an ultimate mutual understanding. The sober science of anthroplogy is attempting to give the lie to Kipling's lilting dogmatism. Neither modern learning nor modern ethics sanction the relegation of obvious intellectual and moral obligations to a remote future. "Five minutes of today is worth as much to me as five minutes of eternity," said Emerson. And over against Kipling's lines one might put the comment of an amazed social worker among the aliens in one of our cities, "The strangest thing to me is that people who are so different are so much alike." It is, then, the interchange of fundamental ideas between the East and the West which makes missions so significant for the modern world. A mission station is a laboratory where one may make experimentally a comparative study of religions.

How different is the actual fact from the fiction still cherished by many. In the popular mind the missionary is still a man who goes out to a foreign land, finds there a strange religion which had previously satisfied the simple folk it sheltered, begins by unsettling the native faith and finally ends by pulling up that faith, root, trunk and branch, substituting for it his own particular denominational Christianity. In the popular mind the mission-

ary still goes to the heathen saying with patronizing condescension, "Yours is a bad religion, you must give it up, and accept the good religion which I am bringing you." This process is judged to be both impudent and interfering. Each of the great races, we are told, has its religion with which it has weathered the centuries, why work havoc and dissatisfaction by pulling down the family gods of the nations. I do not know whether this method existed very generally in the past or not. I shrewdly suspect that it has always flourished more luxuriantly in the minds of the critics of missions than in the lives of the exponents of missions. This was not the way that Jesus worked, who came not to destroy but to fulfill. It is not the way that his great disciples worked. And I do know that at present this method has no part or place in the conduct of the work of our American Board. I have been listening for two years in the Prudential Committee to answers to one of the questions set to candidates for our service, "What is your attitude toward the non-Christian religions?" and I have yet to hear the first word of supercilious or contemptuous regard for Mohammedanism, Buddhism, or Confucianism. "I feel," said one of the candidates and the answer is typical of all, "that every religion has some good in it, and so I would not go to any nation with the intention of tearing down the religion of that nation. Instead it is my desire to bring out the good in their religion, and with my knowledge show them the one great ideal, Christ." Persistent inquiries by officers of the board on deputations to the field have revealed no lapses in practice from this

faith that the religious impulse is a universal impulse, and wherever manifested is to be reverenced and cherished, while also it is to be developed. In view of this fact, which can be verified in an examination of the work of any liberal, modern missionary organization, one may justly have scant patience with those who conceive of modern missions as the effort of the West to destroy the religions of the East.

But while he respects the faith of those to whom he goes the missionary does believe with Josiah Royce, that "Christianity stands before us as the most effective expression of religious longing which the human race, travailing in pain until now, has been able to bring forth . . . that Christianity, thus far at least, is man's most impressive vision of salvation, and his principal glimpse of the homeland of the spirit." And cherishing this conviction, he believes it to be his duty to communicate that added measure of truth which he finds alone in the gospel. His task is not to supplant but to supplement the religious findings of non-Christian faiths, to build upon the foundations already laid by the common religious consciousness.

Moreover this interchange of ideas between Christian and non-Christian faiths will be a wholesome stimulus to our own religion. Missions are reciprocal. Not a little of the material for the comparative study of religion has come from missionary effort. Furthermore the criticisms, not of the original gospel, but of our Western Protestant interpretation and exemplification of that gospel are proving thought-provoking and profitable. In

particular, we shall find that the Orient, with its insistence upon the need for quiet and reflection, will correct the too busy and noisy moods of contemporary Christianity. Perhaps our Oriental converts can somehow lead us back to that deep and tranquil mysticism of Bernard and Tauler and Fox which we seem to have lost awhile. We shall learn from the Christians of the East how to be still with Mary as well as how to serve with Martha. Missions remind us, to our perpetual humiliation, that all of the world religions are eastern religions, that Christianity is an eastern religion, that the genius of the West has been turned into other channels, that we have been perpetuators and interpreters in religion, rather than creators. I believe in foreign missions, then, because in their give and take the Christianity of twentieth century America will be brought to new self-criticism and a fresh self-consciousness. We shall have to reconsider both the original substance of the gospel and our subsequent interpretation of that gospel in the light of the contributions which Oriental discipleship will make to Christianity. Our faith in the gospel wll be made more consistent because of missions than otherwise it would have been. That faith will also be made more confident. I would put Christianity into the open market of the world's idealisms because I know that it can stand that competition. If those who there receive it are blessed those who give will be more blessed.

IV.

And finally, and above all, I believe in foreign missions because they offer the clearest opportunity we have to test our religion upon that austere ideal which Christianity has perpetually celebrated, the unmercenary love of God and man. Even if missions were not reciprocally profitable to the Church, there would still be incumbent upon us the Christian obligation to speak out the faith that is in us, irrespective of the reward. It has been said that there are only two thoroughly far-reaching bodies of metaphor to which the theologian can have recourse in attempting to describe religious experience — love and money. Surely it is the moral glory of the Christian religion that its true symbols are those of the lover and not of the bargainer. Perhaps sometimes foreign missions do not seem to "pay" in the coin of the world. But as H. G. Wells says, "Nothing that is really worth while in life does pay. Men live in order that they may pay for the unpaying things. Love does not pay, art does not pay, happiness does not pay, honesty is not the best policy, generosity invites the ingratitude of the mean; what is the good of this huckster's argument. It revolts all honorable men."

Now it is the supreme excellence of the foreign missionary program that it does test one's religion by the symbol of love and not by the symbol of money. The support of the home church may be, and indeed often is, put frankly upon a business basis. The pew renter and the subscriber get something in return for what they give. Many laymen now candidly regard the upkeep of the

local church not as a charity but as a business proposition. There is much to be said for their contention. For better or for worse the symbols which describe the transactions of the average congregation in the upkeep of their institution are those of trade rather than of love. So, quite frankly, he who sits in the pews is apt to go where he can get the forms of worship, the type of preaching, the quality of music, the fellowship which most directly meet his own need. In the process of natural selection which is forever realining Protestantism there is an inevitable measure of self-seeking.

So, also, with all local philanthropies. There is in them always room for that flaw of self-centredness which, from a religious point of view, mars the whole deed. There is the chance so gratifying to the Old Adam in us, to contemplate with secret pride our own good works, to have the praise and thanks of men, to receive some outward and formal recognition of our good will.

Now all this is far removed from the austere selflessness of real Christianity. That trenchant anonymous manual of devotion, the *"Theologia Germanica"* which Luther counted next the Bible, sums up the whole business of the soul's discipline in these few words, "Be simply and wholly bereft of self." And he cannot be bereft of self, who conducts his religious life after the manner of the trader. It is the business of Christianity in changing the natural man to the spiritual man to convert the bargainer ino the lover. It is office of foreign missions to teach naturally self-centred men and women to become bereft of self and to "lend hoping for nothing in return."

In foreign missions, the opportunity for self-seeking is reduced to a minimum. Whether a man gives his money or his prayers or himself to this work, he gives looking for nothing in return. That returns do come to him, by way of wider sympathies and larger thoughts of God and man, is no part of the original impulse, which is that of the lover to communicate himself without thought of reward.

The Church has cause to give continual thanks for those selfless souls within her ranks, who year after year lift the Christian ideal out of the shrewd bickerings of the market place and reiterate in their lips and in their lives the simple commandment of Jesus to love God and man. A missionary is an indubitable evidence of Christianity. The man who does the splendid, preposterous, incredible thing, who gives up the thought of getting on in the world and goes out to sink himself in some lonely mission station is not prompted by calculating self-concern, he is impelled by what Carlyle calls, "the felt indubitable certainty of experience." The Church should be jealous for her missionaries, not merely for the actual work they do, but even more, perhaps, for the initial religious experiences which prompt them to their task. These experiences are those of the lover and not of the trader.

The laws of human nature are such that when a man has a real experience he must communicate that experience. He must find some opening and expression for that which he has known intimately and profoundly. Painting, sculpture, music, poetry, these are but the outward and visible symbols of inward experience. This is,

in the last resort, the only adequate test of the genuineness of our Christianity. A man may be never so orthodox and never so pious and never so generous in keeping up the church and charities he directs, but if he cannot understand that selflessness which leads as a logical result to foreign missions, he has missed the genius of Christianity. The Church which is indifferent to missions is merely keeping alive an ecclesiastical convention, it is not perpetuating and propagating the religion of Jesus. It is living at second hand upon the dogmatic traditions of the past, and not upon spiritual experiences in the present. For in religion, as in art and letters and love and life, what is deep and real must communicate itself without thought of recompense. If you do not believe in missions, you are out of touch with the mind of Christ and with the communion of the saints. If you are still a religious bargainer you belong under the Old Covenant, not under the New Covenant. If there is nothing in your religious life, which without thought of self, you must communicate to other men, then your religion means little or nothing to you.

I believe in foreign missions, then, because above all other forms of Church work they offer the Church her supreme opportunity to test her faith and practice by the highest ideal which religion has yet achieved, the unmercenary love of God and the unselfish love of man; because they offer her her one clearest opportunity to find her life by losing it.

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